

BROCK'S BANTER: Monumental Decision

By Brock Weir

And, there we have it.

After a hasty decision by Council to take the Queen's York Rangers and, in turn, the Federal Government, up on their offer to place a light armoured vehicle (LAV) at the Aurora Cenotaph (otherwise known as the Aurora Peace Park), a plan which instigated something of an uproar in these pages, on the blogosphere, and in other venues, a tentative motion from Councillor Abel testing the waters on reconsidering the idea was swamped.

Upon the withdrawal of the motion from the Councillor, the LAV will, in the end, find its place alongside the 80-year-old monument dedicated to the local boys and men who gave their lives during the First World War, and its younger brother, the Altar of Sacrifice, which memorializes all those who perished in the Second.

Since the idea was floated earlier this fall, it has been quite a whirlwind and a decision I fear has been based on emotion not just once, but twice.

Personally, I have no objection to a tank being placed at the Cenotaph, despite this greenspace being rededicated to the purposes of perpetuating peace. Indeed, this vehicle itself, it could be argued ? and was so argued at last week's Council meeting ? is one means to achieve that end.

A monument to men and women serving Queen and Country in Afghanistan is indisputably overdue within this community and in countless communities across Canada, a point eloquently driven home by members of the Royal Canadian Legion at the podium last week, but is the placement of an LAV really the best way we can honour our soldiers?

During Col. Kirk Corkery's

delegation to Council last week, he repeatedly referred to this decommissioned light armoured vehicle as a ?monument.? I suppose once the machine itself is gutted, rendered useless, and placed on a concrete pad, it is indeed something of a monument ? if little else ? but, in the end, it is simply a vehicle on a piece of cement.

If we are looking for a way to honour not only the men and women who lost their lives on the Afghanistan front but also the individuals who served, and were lucky enough to come back, we can and should do better than just an army vehicle no longer needed by the Canadian Government and left to moulder away as a silent testament to whatever those taking it in choose.

The Cenotaph and the Altar of Sacrifice both incorporate the names of the individuals their very creation is meant to represent, they are imbued with symbolism that meant a lot to the families they left behind and continue to evoke these same feelings in the generations that followed.

It seems that the LAV placement is now a done deal, but since Council took it upon themselves to forge ahead with this plan with little to no public consultation other than feedback received through a few emails and letters, it is incumbent upon them to take the next steps in kicking it up a notch and create a true monument, one our veterans and our fallen deserve to honour their services.

But, let's be real. Our lawmakers were stuck between a rock and a hard place, very much by design.

I hate to use the word ?uncomfortable? as a criticism as it is a word that is thrown about so often it has essentially lost its meaning, but that is exactly the atmosphere that permeated the Council Chamber on Tuesday night.

In his efforts to persuade Council to stay the course on the matter, Col. Corkery was accompanied to the meeting by two uniformed members of the Queen's York Rangers, as well as several members of the Queen's York Rangers Regimental Council. These uniformed men, he said, as is the case with all serving members of the military, are not permitted to speak out on matters of political import, yet there they were, brought out by the Regiment in their finery, their hard-earned medals sparkling in the lights overhead, sitting silently but emotionally, their views on the matter clear to all those who were able to see. And yet, they barely moved a muscle.

One can certainly understand their position and why the placement of this LAV is of supreme importance to them. Many of those who came back owe their lives in part to machines like this. They represent an emotional significance to those of us who did not serve will never truly comprehend, but to be brought out for this kind of debate and distressingly be featured as silent props in this debate, was an alarming disservice to these brave men.

?I ask you to consider what you would tell those young soldiers like the two who have joined me this evening,? said Col. Corkery.

?As serving soldiers, they are not permitted to speak to political issues: but understand this: they are reservists who volunteered to go into harm's way.?

That is very true, but had Council taken a pause and devised a community consultation process, perhaps these two young soldiers

could have been given the opportunity to weigh in on what would then not be a political issue so Council could get the thoughts of serving soldiers on the best way to remember their comrades.

Their presence, along with uniformed representatives of the Royal Canadian Legion, stacked the deck and created a situation where Council, had they objected to the very real concerns of some members of the community, would have appeared heartless, without feeling, and discounting the contributions of people who put their lives on the line when they could have simply said yes.

?I would also note, and I find this particularly sad, that I do not believe that the people who have written to you, or in the papers, saw fit to attend the Remembrance Day ceremony held earlier this month,? Col. Corkery added.

Having attended both of this year's Remembrance Day services, and actually participated in the Remembrance Sunday service, I could not tell you whether the four or five writers who shared their opinion with this newspaper were in attendance that day. My thoughts on Sunday were on the task at hand and, on Remembrance Day itself the following Wednesday, were once again turned to the meaning behind the day.

Were they there? Perhaps. I couldn't say. But I could never be as bold as to say with complete certainty that they weren't. If that was the focus of anybody in attendance on either day, that is sad indeed. If, in fact, they weren't there, does that ultimately render their concerns ? legitimate concerns, in my view ? invalid?

I certainly hope not.